

what's up?

emotional development

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What's it all about?

Adolescence brings changes in young people's thought processes, self-concepts, and social and emotional development. Between the ages of 10 and 15, young people begin to think abstractly and thoughtfully, leading them to question rules, boundaries and social norms. They learn new social skills and how to cope with the excitement and confusion that comes with the rapid physical changes of puberty. Their own appearance and their relationships with friends take on greater importance. Their interest in their own sexuality awakens. Like their bodies, young people's minds, emotions, and social skills develop at different rates during adolescence. This variation and diversity is natural between genders and individuals.

Why does it matter?

Adolescence is an important time of transition into adulthood.

- It's a time to work toward autonomy—in emotions, behavior and values.
- It can be a time of egocentrism (too much focus on oneself) and sensitivity to apparent contradictions ("these rules apply to you, but not to me") leading to conflicts with parents and other adults.
- Emotional maturity develops in different stages than physical maturity, so it is helpful to recognize the signs of both.

What are the details?

	Early: Transition to adolescence and puberty	Middle: Essence of adolescence, strong peer group influence
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• challenge authority; anti-parent• loneliness• wide mood swings• rejection of childhood things• argumentative and disobedient• desire for more privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• family conflicts predominate due to ambivalence about emerging independence
Body Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• preoccupation with physical changes• critical of appearance• anxieties about physical signs of puberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• increased efforts to improve appearance• excessive physical activity alternating with lethargy
Peer Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• intense friendships with same sex• contact with opposite sex in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• strong peer allegiances• fad behavior• sexual drives emerge• interest in dating
Identity Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Am I normal?"• daydreaming• vocational goals change frequently• begin to develop own value system• emerging sexual feelings/exploration• desire for more privacy• magnify own problems; "no one understands"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• experimentation—sex, drugs, friends, jobs, risk-taking behaviors• more realistic vocational goals• begin to realize strengths and limitations• increased intellectual ability and creativity

What can I do?

The best thing adults can do to help teens grow positively throughout their emotional development is to know and understand what to expect and to offer support and understanding to the teens in their lives.

- Learn about adolescent development. There are many excellent books, brochures and websites. Also see the resources below.
- Share what you know with teens to provide reassurance, such as information about how each teen grows at a different rate.
- As a parent, show your love and support. Teens need a strong sense of belonging to feel they are part of something. If they don't get it from healthy places (family, youth groups, sports, clubs) they might look to gangs, cults, or friends you consider inappropriate.
- Strive for open communication. Create an environment where teens feel safe in discussing sensitive subjects with you. In well-functioning families, teens have a voice. They might not always have a vote, but they have a voice!
- Look for other strong adult relationships in a young person's life—including teachers, coaches, and providers.
- Create opportunities to help adolescents be strong advocates for their own care and savvy consumers of health care. Teach them to take responsibility for their appointments and ask their health care providers questions if they do not understand something.
- Understand the limits of what health information can or cannot be shared by an adolescent's health care provider.
- Acknowledge the positive social aspects of adolescence. Teens get a bad rap when we focus on their difficulties, or when the positives are forgotten or ignored.
- If you don't want the teen in your life to do something, don't do it yourself.
- This is a time for risk taking. Help teens take positive risks like climbing a mountain.

Am I there yet?

Late adolescence into adulthood

Teens approaching the end of high school find themselves transitioning to an independent, adult role. What does this mean? Here are a few indicators:

- Increased autonomy—making decisions about higher education, work and adult responsibilities
- Usually being comfortable with body image
- Decisions/values are less influenced by peers
- Greater goal-setting capacity
- Selection of a partner based on individual preference
- More realistic vocational goals
- Relating to family as an adult
- Realization of own limitations and mortality
- Establishment of sexual identity
- Establishment of value system
- Capability of intimate and complex relationships
- Understanding of the consequences of behavior
- Social and cultural traditions regain some of their previous importance

**hot
links!**

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-126 11/2003
www.doh.wa.gov

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

University of Washington www.washington.edu/admin/hr/worklife/parentingteens.html
Links to useful resources for parents of adolescents

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org
Go to Facts for Families, "Normal Adolescent Development" (Fact Sheets #57 and #58)

Kids Health www.kidshealth.org
Information for parents, teens and kids

All Family Resources www.familymanagement.com
Go to Facts for Families, "Normality" and "Adolescent Development" (Fact Sheets #22 and #57)

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002 <http://www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/>

American Medical Association www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html
Guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services (GAPS)



Dear Colleague,

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is pleased to provide camera-ready art for printing this educational material. To ensure that the original quality of the piece is maintained, please read and follow the instructions below and the specifications included for professional printing.

- **Use the latest version.** DOH materials are developed using the most current information available, are checked for clinical accuracy, and are field tested with the intended audience to ensure they are clear and readable. DOH programs make periodic revisions to educational materials, so please check this web site to be sure you have the latest version. DOH assumes no responsibility for the use of this material or for any errors or omissions.
- **Do not alter.** We are providing this artwork with the understanding that it will be printed without alterations and copies will be free to the public. Do not edit the text or use illustrations or photographs for other purposes without first contacting us. Please do not alter or remove the DOH logo, publication number or revision date. If you want to use a part of this publication for other purposes, contact the Office of Health Promotion first.
- **For quality reproduction:** Low resolution PDF files are intended for black and white or color desktop printers. They work best if you are making only one or two copies. High resolution PDF files are intended for reproducing large quantities and are set up for use by professional offset print shops. The high resolution files also include detailed printing specifications. Please match them as closely as possible and insist on the best possible quality for all reproductions.

If you have questions, contact:

Office of Health Promotion

P.O. Box 47833 Olympia, WA 98504-7833

(360) 236-3736

Sincerely,

Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team